Environmental health officer

Job description

Environmental health practitioners play an important role in private industry and in the state sector in ensuring that proper standards are achieved. They do this through advice, education, monitoring and regulation.

Formerly known as health inspectors, environmental health officers are responsible for monitoring and enforcing standards of environmental and public health, including food hygiene, safety at work, housing and noise and pollution control, preventing environmental health conditions injurious to health and promoting good environmental practices. The main duties forming the scope of the EHO’s work may be grouped under the following headings:- Food control, hygiene education, water monitoring, tobacco, housing, air pollution, noise, infectious diseases, pest control, poisons regulations, childcare.

Work activities

• Visiting business premises to investigate levels of cleanliness and health standards.
• Investigating complaints, cases of food poisoning, or pest infestations and arranging for legal proceedings to be taken against serious offenders.
• Running courses on health and safety.
• Monitoring of fluoridation of public water supplies.
• Ensuring that defective privately rented houses are made fit for habitation.
• Measuring and controlling the air pollution from commercial and industrial sources.
• Investigating cases of serious infectious diseases.
• Inspecting pre-school services such as playgroups, to ensure that the specified health standards are achieved.
• Monitoring food imports from non EU countries.
• Keeping abreast of legislation, writing reports and liaising with other safety team members.

Work conditions

Travel: during work day is frequent as well as working away from home.

Working hours: regular extra hours but not weekends or shifts.

Location: opportunities exist mainly in towns or cities throughout the country.

Opportunities for self-employment: possible to work as a self-employed environmental health practitioner.

Typical employers

• Large manufacturers
• Occupational health and safety consultancies
• Health service executive
• Local authorities.

Career development

Progression within the HSE is normally to Senior EHO, Principal EHO and then to Area Chief EHO. Opportunities also exist with public bodies eg Food Safety Authority of Ireland; Office of Tobacco Control; Sea Fisheries Protection Agency; Department of Health & Children.

Salaries

Salaries will vary depending on the employer and the specific job description.
Environmental health officer (continued)

Entry requirements and training

Specific degree subjects required
To become an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) it is necessary to hold a qualification approved by the Department of Health and Children.

The Dublin Institute of Technology runs a 4 year BSc degree in Environmental Health. The University of Ulster also runs a BSc course in Environmental Health in Jordanstown.

Postgraduate study
A pre-entry postgraduate qualification is a requirement for those not holding a recognised undergraduate degree in the field. There is an active post-graduate training programme including diploma and MSc courses in Environmental Science, Environmental Protection, Environmental Health, Community Health, Occupational Health and Safety and Food Science at various centres throughout the country.

Training
Students spend periods working in approved industrial placements with the Health Service Executive experiencing professional practice.

Tips for applications
Meet EHOs to discuss the kind of work they do; undertake work experience to sample the profession at first hand.

Skills and qualities
• Commitment to safeguarding public health.
• Enthusiasm and attention to detail at all times.
• Good communication skills to explain safety procedures and regulations clearly and concisely.
• A calm, professional manner to defuse potential confrontations along with the ability to deal with people who are distressed or angry.
• Good negotiating skills, patience and tact.
• Ability to enforce the law where necessary.
• Good organisational skills to prepare cases using own evidence and chemical analyses.
• Must be prepared to appear in court.

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